

**NPS-09-16-09 Batch 1**

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Transcription Date: 09/19/09 - Transcriber: RMR

[BEGIN AUDIO]

MR. DANIEL MARTINEZ: The following oral history interview was conducted on November 9, 1992 at Midway Island. The time is 9:00 in the morning. The subject is Mr. John Gardner. The interviewer is Mr. Daniel Martinez, Historian for the National Parks Service. This oral history project is a cooperative effort of the United States Navy, ComNavBase Pearl Harbor, Barbers Point Naval Air Station and the State of Hawaii Historic Preservation Division and the National Parks Service. For the record could you please state your full name?

MR. JOHN V. GARDNER: John Vincent Gardner.

MR. MARTINEZ: And your age sir?

MR. GARDNER: 70 1/2.

MR. MARTINEZ: And your current address?

MR. GARDNER: 11551 Tree Top Circle, that's three words, Nevada City, California 95959.

MR. MARTINEZ: And your date of birth?

MR. GARDNER: January 16, 1922.

MR. MARTINEZ: And your place of birth?

MR. GARDNER: Huntington Park, California.

MR. MARTINEZ: And how many were in your family?

MR. GARDNER: I have one brother, three years younger than I.

MR. MARTINEZ: Did your brother fight in World War II?

MR. GARDNER: Yes, he was in the Air Force and came up through the Philippines in that way as a Crew Chief in the end when they got to Okinawa.

MR. MARTINEZ: Mom and dad stayed together while you were young people?

MR. GARDNER: No, they were divorced and I grew up with my mother's parents out east of Visalia, California.

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MR. MARTINEZ: Where did you go to grammar school and high school?

MR. GARDNER: Went to grammar school at a little school known as Venice Hills School, nine miles east of Visalia, California. And I went to Visalia Union High School in Visalia.

MR. MARTINEZ: And what year did you enlist in?

MR. GARDNER: June 13, 1940.

MR. MARTINEZ: And why did you enlist?

MR. GARDNER: Well you have to remember those were depression years and [video cut away]

MR. MARTINEZ: John why did you enlist?

MR. GARDNER: Well if you think back those were the depression years and jobs weren't easy to find and you didn't have the counsel in high school that you have today and I didn't have parents that pushed me. And I didn't really, because my father wanted me to go to college, wanted me to go to Cal, but I was too smart for that. I didn't want to go to Cal and I'd had in mind I'd join the Navy and see the world. And after getting out of high school I looked around for a job and as I say jobs were hard to find and one day I thought well I'll go up in Fresno and see if I can get in the Marine Corps because they won't have me. Marines were hard to get in and you know it would be great to talk about. I tried to get in the Marine Corps, well that day they examined 12 people and I was the only one passed. So I went in the Marine Corps.

MR. MARTINEZ: So it wasn't something you chose consciously, it was kind of maybe --

MR. GARDNER: On a lark.

MR. MARTINEZ: Well where did that lark take you?

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MR. GARDNER: Well it took me to San Diego to the Recruit Depot and through Boot Camp like everyone happened to do. And along during boot training, it was pretty hot in the latter part of June in San Diego and pounding that grinder all day marching back and forth got old and one day the DI mentioned that they were going to give some examinations for either Radio Operator or Telephone Man. And I thought this would be an easy way to get out of some drill for a couple hours. I had no intention of being Telephone Man. And I went up there with four or five other people, or whatever number, and half-heartedly took the exam. Well I failed the radio fortunately, but I did pass the telephone exam. I didn't know this until graduation day at Boot Camp because my heart was set on being a sea-going Marine and wearing blues. And I wanted to go to China in the worst way. And I thought if I could go to the Asiatic Fleet that would be the way to accomplish that and I had selected the Cruiser Houston as a nice place. And you know you don't have much opportunity to win these things. Fortunately in my case I didn't. And that day that they were dividing up the Platoon to their various stations after Boot Camp, I was left standing after they picked several men for Sea School. And I was among the taller and I hadn't totally goofed off in Boot Camp. I was kind of broken hearted there for a little bit when they told me to fall out for telephone school. Probably the luckiest thing ever happened.

MR. MARTINEZ: Why is that?

MR. GARDNER: Because the Cruiser Houston had [video skips] it was sunk three or four weeks after the war started and some of my friends that did go to Sea School, one in particular I remember is on the Arizona, was on the Arizona on the morning it was attacked, and is there.

MR. MARTINEZ: Do you recall his name?

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MR. GARDNER: Noletubby. He was a part Indian from Oklahoma. A real nice kid, he and I were quite good friends.

MR. MARTINEZ: That was his full name or his last name?

MR. GARDNER: Noletubby was his last name.

MR. MARTINEZ: You can't recall his first name?

MR. GARDNER: Can't say it at the moment. I do have it at home and he is on the roster.

MR. MARTINEZ: What was the most rigorous part of your training for you when you were in basic?

MR. GARDNER: You know, 50-odd years after the fact, I don't recall it was difficult for me. I didn't have too much trouble. Holding the rifle out like that when they were punishing everybody and wondering how much longer I could hold before I dropped it. Some of the long jogs with packs on was difficult. I grew up on a farm, was in pretty good shape. And not to say I wasn't angry at the DI, I could have killed him a number of times, but it wasn't all that bad for me. My grandmother, I lived under discipline and order and getting in the Marine Corps wasn't that difficult as I recall. And doing what they wanted.

MR. MARTINEZ: A lot of the veterans have some special DI stories. Do you have one? Something that you recall?

MR. GARDNER: No, not that really anything happened to me. I can tell you a couple of things that happened to the group, because you're punished as a unit. Somebody had done something and the property behind, or to the south of the San Diego Marine Recruit Depot was sand and you could clear over to North Island. The aircraft carrier Ranger used to be tied over there and you could see it in the distance. And that was all sand much like here at Midway. And so for punishment one night, just about taps, 10:00 they decided that's when they would start the punishment

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procedure. They sent a number of people with laundry buckets to go out there and get sand to carry it back which fricked your hands, and I got that. I wasn't the person that caused the problem, but everybody was being punished. And we brought that sand in and scattered it over the deck and then washed it down and got down there on our hands and knees and scrubbed it with whatever [video skips] two hours. And then we had to get all that sand out of there before reveille in the morning. So around 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning, about reveille time, we had it cleaned up to the satisfaction of Sergeant Joe Pender, the DI. I remember that. I remember throwing the cigarette butt down and so the person has to go out and dig a hole six feet long, six feet deep in the sand, and you can't do it. It'll just keep caving in. And the ones that dropped their rifle and have to go sit up in a tree with a bucket on their head and say "I'm a shit head, I dropped my rifle". I remember those things. The worst thing that I recall that I pulled, we had the Springfield 03's and on inspection arms when we threw the bolt open, I didn't have the lock down and I threw the bolt about 50 feet across the parade ground. I was dressed down for that a bit.

MR. MARTINEZ: After you were given the telephone training, how long did that take?

MR. GARDNER: I think that school was a month or more and it was down on the west side of the parade ground and one of the barracks, it still stands, I was there this last June. It was a month or more. The radio operators went longer. I went to telephone school and completed that and was sent over across the parade ground at the tent camp had been created because there wasn't enough barracks space and there was the 2nd Defense Battalion, the forming of the 2nd Defense Battalion.

[END AUDIO]